

Paul's Conversion: Apologetic for the Authenticity of Christianity



In 1747, Lord Lyttelton (1709-1773), a Member of Parliament,^[1] wrote a letter to Gilbert West (1703-1756)^[2] concerning *Observations on the Conversion of St Paul*. Lyttelton's friend, Gilbert West, wrote, at the same time, a book on *Observations on the Resurrection of Christ*. Both men subscribed to the principles of infidelity, which infidelity, according to Rev. T. T. Biddolph, resulted from a superficial view of the Sacred Writings.^[3] These two men came together to expose the incongruities, so they thought, concerning Paul's conversion and Christ's resurrection. In the course of their quest to scorn the Bible, both men ultimately wrote in defense of the Scriptures as God's Revelation to humanity. Initially, both Lyttelton and West sat down with their prejudices to overthrow the truth of Christianity, but, in the course of their separate attempts, these two men were converted by their efforts to put an end to the validity of Christianity. Their findings were published in separate accounts in 1747.^[4]

What happened to these two men in 1747 is also seen in the lives of two men who lived in the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, two names stand out in particular concerning belief from skepticism, or atheism, to belief in Jesus—Frank Morrison and C. S. Lewis (1898-1963). The story of Frank Morrison is appropriate to reflect upon as an excellent example of the study of Christian apologetics. Morrison's work concerning a defense of the resurrection of Jesus is a classic in the study of the Resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. He wrote his book in 1930 in defense of the resurrection of Jesus, which was not his original intent. Morrison was an English journalist who set out to prove that the story of Christ's resurrection was nothing but a myth.

Yet, his probing led him to faith in the risen Christ.^[5] Another person, C. S. Lewis, started out as a skeptic, but he, too, became a believer through analyzing the evidence for the Christian faith. His book *Mere Christianity*^[6] is one of the most outstanding books in the field of Christian apologetics to this day. He writes with terseness and a keen sense of common logic about one who rejects Jesus' Messiahship, and, at the same time, portrays Jesus as a good man. One cannot maintain that Jesus was a good man and, at the same time, deny His claims. Lewis rightly concludes that Jesus could not be a good moral

teacher and say the things He said about His divinity:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that upon to us. He did not intend to.^[7]

All four writers contributed to the weightiness of the evidence concerning the truthfulness of Christianity. There are many types of apologetics. This particular study focuses upon Paul's conversion as an apologetic for the defense and truthfulness of the Christian faith. One can say that Paul's conversion is another aspect of Christian apologetics that proves the integrity of the Christian faith. This paper investigates Paul's acceptance of Jesus Christ as an excellent example of the trustworthiness of Christianity as authentic and valid and convincing. The yielding of Paul to the call of Christ attests to the credibility of the genuineness of the Christian faith. This analysis of Paul's conversion to Christ follows the basic arguments found in Lord Lyttelton's book about Paul's acceptance of Jesus as God. In the writing of this study, I am deeply indebted to Lyttelton for his informative book (1747) on Paul's conversion.

As stated above, Christians can approach Christian apologetics from several different perspectives. One may focus upon the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament; one may concentrate upon the miracles of Christ; or one may pinpoint his or her studies upon the Resurrection of Christ—a resurrection that the apostles provide ample testimony as to the truthfulness of this belief. This essay's primary objective is to highlight the conversion of Paul as sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation from God, not some mythological story about the gods of the ancient world. As one approaches the conversion of Paul to Christianity, one discovers no rational motive for his becoming a disciple of Christ.

One cannot uncover any illogical enthusiasm for Paul's embrace of Christianity. Paul's enthusiasm for Christianity is sound, not irrational. His life attests to the reality of its conviction in his own mind as true. Did Paul have the ingredients of an enthusiast that borders on the fringes of insanity, or madness? The word *enthusiasm*, as a whole, in this study focuses on the negative characteristics of enthusiasm rather than the positive. Every Christian should possess the positive and not the negative features of enthusiasm. The negative side of enthusiasm focuses on gullibility, ignorance, overheated imagination, vanity, and so on. The negative facets of enthusiasm are associated with men like David Koresh, Jim Jones, or Benny Hinn. Lord Lyttelton writes about and captures the heart of the negative side of enthusiasm as related to the conversion of Paul to Christianity. He proves that Paul's conversion did not occur from gullibility, ignorance, vanity, glory, power, or an overheated imagination. One should pay attention to Lyttelton's writings as

he unfolds the negative, or harmful trait, of enthusiasm upon unsuspecting minds: “Now these are the Ingredients of which *Enthusiasm* is generally composed; great Heat of Temper, Melancholy, Ignorance, Credulity, Vanity, or Self-conceit.”^[8]

Did Paul have an overheated imagination? Was he prone to “credulity”? Did he suffer from “vanity” or “self-conceit”? Was he “ignorant” or educated? Did he suffer from “melancholy,” or “down in the dumps”? Was he given to “credulity,” or naïveté? A cursory reading of Paul’s own account of his talk with the risen Lord reveals that he was neither an enthusiast from the damaging point of view that borders on the outer edges of lunacy, nor does his own personal description of his conversion portray one with an inflamed mind’s eye for the fantastic. His two descriptions of his own conversion reveal soberness in his reaction to the Lord’s call. An analysis of Paul’s conversion in his own words reveals that he acted with soberness and gravity and weightiness in his decision to commit his life to the cause of Christ, which examination concerning his frame of mind, or way of thinking, will be investigated more thoroughly toward the end of this discussion.

Throughout this essay, this study focuses upon certain features of the negative, or injurious, characteristics of enthusiasm. Even though this paper concentrates, on the whole, on the negative facets of enthusiasm, nevertheless, there is room, stated earlier, for the positive, or constructive, viewpoint of enthusiasm in Christianity. In other words, enthusiasm is characteristic of anyone who understands the truthfulness of the Christian message (**Romans 12:11**). But this enthusiasm is also tempered with prudence, or good sense; it is not a wild, or lunatic, enthusiasm that accepts beliefs without reasonable examination (see **Acts 8:26-40**, Philip and the Eunuch). One observes throughout Paul’s ministry that his zeal was eager and warm and tempered with prudence. One witnesses this kind of demeanor before Fetus, Agrippa, and Felix.

PAUL’S COST FOR ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST

If one wishes to penetrate Paul’s mind concerning the effects of his removal to Christianity from Judaism, one should allow him to tell his particular story in his own personal words. This study of Paul’s conversion is peppered with Scripture citations from his own writings in order to enter into Paul’s own thinking about the events surrounding his turnaround. Just a casual reading of Paul’s comments to the various congregations reveals the devastating effects upon his earlier life as a result of his acceptance of Jesus. In this acknowledgment of Christ, one witnesses that Paul’s swap-over to Christ cost him, perhaps, a fortune, a reputation, and friends. He, no doubt, was making inroads within the Pharisaic party, and as a result of his recognition of Christ as the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, he repudiated a standing that he had gained through his zeal and labors and studies with the Pharisees, especially under Gamaliel. Paul himself comments upon his position among the Jews before his conversion and after his change:

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I

consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (**Philippians 3:4-11**).^[9]

While in prison, Paul wrote this letter from Rome about AD 61. Why would Paul consider everything that was to his profit as loss for the sake of Christ? Did his experience with Christ really happen? If this encounter did not take place, one wonders why he gave up his friends, why he gave up his relationship with his colleagues, and, perhaps, members of his own blood family. The Scriptures are silent about his family members, except his sister and a nephew (One does not know if Paul had more than one sister). In his approval of Christ, he virtually estranged and banished himself for life from all that was so dear to him. In one of his earliest epistles (Galatians AD 48/49) he comments about this loss and why he was willing to sacrifice his life:

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth^a and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus (**Galatians 1:11-17**).

PAUL: IMPOSTOR OR AUTHENTIC?

Paul states emphatically: “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (**Galatians 1:14**). The Jewish nation soared in its religious opinions and in its strict orthodoxy that it had inherited from its forefathers—200 years of oral tradition. The strictest sect among the Jews was the Pharisees. Paul was brought up under this discipline. Surely he must have suffered emotional feelings in departing so suddenly from his party and becoming an adversary overnight to his former training. In Paul’s autobiographical note about his prejudice against Christians, one sees one who was strongly confirmed in Judaism. In spite of the allurements of honor and advantage among the religious leaders who rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah, he renounced his prior opposition to Christ. Paul sacrificed his whole way of life to become a follower of the Way. As a result of his decision to pursue Jesus as the hope of Israel, one witnesses the cold-hearted retaliation of those whom he deserted. He received contempt from those whom he had courted and sought their blessings. If Paul had not had this heavenly vision from the risen Christ, one cannot help

but wonder why he would have chosen humiliation and poverty and persecution over fame, fortune, affluence, prestige, status, standing, clout, muscle, and power if he had not had a real discussion with the risen Jesus.

As a result of his actions against his own party, one sees the horrible retribution inflicted against him that would have frightened away any impostor, fake, or fraud, especially one knowingly engaged in the most hopeless scam as a charlatan and a cheater. For Paul to endure such harm, he would have to be absolutely out of his senses to engage in defending that which the religious leaders hated with passion, fury, and anger. Prior to Paul's conversion, he, too, shared this rage, this fury, and this wrath of hatred toward Christians ([Acts 22](#) and [26](#)). Luke, after Paul's conversion to Christianity, gives a comment about Paul's opposition to the Christian faith. Pay attention to him as he seeks to capture the animosity of Paul and the religious leaders against believers in Christ:

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem ([Acts 9:1-2](#)).

Luke's statement about Paul's rage against Christ's disciples is mild compared to Paul's own personal versions as recorded by Luke in [Acts 22](#) and [26](#), which reports give evidence as to the authenticity of Paul's change from Judaism to Christianity. Paul knew that this opposition to him would be just as vicious as his own actions against Christians prior to his acknowledgment of Christ as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Yet, in spite of his consciousness of persecution that awaited him, Paul did not retreat from his belief in Christ—a conviction that brought down upon his head the wrath, the rage, the anger, and the fury of the religious leaders. Why would Paul tolerate such tragedy and misfortune and disaster in his life unless he really experienced a direct encounter with the risen Jesus?

After Paul's immediate rendezvous with the Lord Jesus, the Lord appeared to Ananias, the one whom He sent to counsel Paul about his new mission to advance God's kingdom upon earth: "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Previous to Paul's recognition of Jesus as the promised Messiah, as stated earlier, he persecuted Christians with vehemence and enthusiasm. After his change, he became the persecuted and the hunted, not the persecutor. How does one explain his transformation from unbeliever to believer? Why was Paul willing to suffer ill-treatment? The answer lies in his direct exchange with the Lord Jesus Himself. His recognition of Jesus resulted in suffering beyond the endurance of many men and women.

The reality of his talking with Jesus of Nazareth is the only rational and realistic motivation for his willingness to undergo such ghastly and atrocious treatment. About twenty-three years after his switch to Christ, he wrote his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (AD 55) about his sufferings for Christ:

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in

the open sea,²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying.³² In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me.³³ But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands (2 Corinthians 11:23-33).

NO DESIRE FOR GLORY OR POWER

“I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked,” writes Paul. Are these the words of an impostor? Are these the words of a charlatan? Are these the words of one who seeks power? Are these the words of one who seeks fame and glory? In Paul’s acceptance of Christ, one does not detect the desire of glory or the ambition of making a great name for himself. No! His motive for accepting Christianity did not focus on the love of power. He knew that the anger of the religious leaders against a deserter and betrayer of their cause would be poured forth against him with all political power at their disposal. He knew that the same rage that he had earlier perpetrated upon Christians would now be put into effect against him. Many years after his conversion, he wrote his First Epistle to the Corinthians in which he describes the way the world views the followers of Christ:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. (1 Corinthians 4:9-13).

This graphic picture of his plight reveals that his decision to become a follower of Christ did not result from a love of power. If one postulates Paul’s overhaul from Judaism to Christ as a struggle to gain power, one wonders about the nature of this so-called power. The question naturally presents itself: power over whom? Is it power over sheep to be slaughtered, whose shepherd had Himself been murdered by crucifixion? Could Paul expect more leniency, or mercy, than had been shown to Jesus Himself? The writings of Paul display with great clarity that he never sought power over anyone. In fact, one reads the very opposite of a grab for authority in Paul’s demeanor. He writes unashamedly:

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things (**Ephesians 3:8-9**).

He did not pretend any superiority over God's people. Nor did he assume pre-eminence over other apostles. Again, he pens his thoughts about himself and the other apostles:

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.¹¹ Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed (**1 Corinthians 15:9-11**).

Again, in this same epistle, he expresses himself simply as an instrument of God's grace, no special prerogatives over others who also proclaimed Christ. Paul writes with deep conviction as he seeks to suppress factious parties within the body of Christ:

What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas^a"; still another, "I follow Christ."¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into^b the name of Paul?¹⁴ I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius,¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized into my name.¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.)¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power (**1:12-17**).

Once more, Paul speaks of himself as a servant, not an overlord: "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?" (**3:5a**). He is only a servant. One's servanthood comes about through service to Jesus. Listen to Paul as he captures this mindset: "Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task" (**3:5b**). This condescension is the attitude of this one whom God chose to carry His message of salvation to the Gentiles and Jews. Paul served individuals with instruction and edification, not as an authoritative figure. Ultimately, Paul desired the same commitment that he displayed in his own ministry in the lives of those he converted. He wanted the same steadfastness manifested in his own life to be in the lives of his converts in order to exhibit God's glory in their daily walk. He expresses his ultimate goal of conversion and his willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ:

Do everything without complaining or arguing,¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe¹⁶ as you hold out^a the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or

labor for nothing. ¹⁷ But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. ¹⁸ So you too should be glad and rejoice with me (**Philippians 2:14-17**).

Are these the words of an impostor? Paul, who looks beyond the bounds of this life, did not take advantage of his higher education and superior learning. In his heart-searching letter to the Corinthians, he writes about his testimony about God:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (**1 Corinthians 2:1-5**).

THE SPIRIT'S POWER: MIRACULOUS

“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,” writes Paul. These words set the tone for success in his evangelistic endeavors, in spite of persecution, maltreatment, and harassment. The faith he proclaimed was not of his own invention. In order for him to achieve something in this mission of preaching Jesus, he had to have a knowledge that was equal to that which the original apostles possessed. Since he had not earlier met Jesus or His apostles, he had to have this information. He received this knowledge directly from Jesus, which equipped him for his ministry. But his seeing Jesus was not completely sufficient to accomplish such a formidable task to convert heathens—people who knew nothing about the Old Testament prophecies. Something else was needed, namely, the ability to perform miracles in order to convince those to whom he proclaimed the message of redemption.

Paul's success depended upon the Spirit's power, that is to say, the miraculous. The method of proclaiming the word of salvation was with “a demonstration of the Spirit's power.” Paul's preaching required the working of miracles in order to give validity to his message of redemption from darkness to light. In order for Paul to combat the several philosophical schools of his day, he needed something more than just his having seen Jesus. Paul faced almost insurmountable odds from the magistrates, from the priest, from the people, and from the philosophers. He needed something stronger than just arguments or reason in dealing with a heathen population. Thus, he tells the Corinthians, as just stated:

I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (**1 Corinthians 2:3-5**).

To the Thessalonians, he, too, expresses the miraculous power associated with the preaching of the Word. Paul writes: “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (**1 Thessalonians 1:4-5**). In order to gain

converts to Christ, this feat called for extraordinary power—the miraculous. It is in this vein that Luke records an astounding statement about Paul’s work in Ephesus: “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul,¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them” ([Acts 19:11](#)).

This divine power enabled Paul to experience success. This power proved that he was not an impostor. John, too, calls attention to the testimony of miracles as proof of one’s calling or mission. John records the coming of Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, to Jesus with these words about the miraculous in Jesus’ ministry:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” ([John 3:1-2](#)).

To the individuals to whom Paul worked miracles, these persons were not in favor of him nor of the doctrines he taught. If Paul’s work had been confined to Jerusalem, many of these citizens, not all, would have been inclined more toward the miraculous than the Gentiles in foreign counties, at least it appears this way from the historical accounts of Paul’s missionary journeys. In Jerusalem, many had witnessed the miracles of Jesus and His apostles. Even on the Day of Pentecost, three thousand were converted in one day as a result of a miracle—speaking in tongues ([Acts 2](#)).

Shortly after this miraculous event took place, one reads about the healing of a man at the temple ([Acts 3](#)) and the number of the men growing to 5,000 ([Acts 4](#)). Again, one reads of Peter’s shadow falling on individuals and miraculous cures occurred just from his shadow:

¹² The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹³ No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. ¹⁵ As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. ¹⁶ Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil^a spirits, and all of them were healed ([Acts 5:12-16](#)).

If Paul had limited his work to Jerusalem, this manifestation of the Spirit’s power, through miracles, would have been a good foundation for his labors. But this was not the case in his missionary journeys to the Gentiles. In Paul’s journeys among the Gentiles, one discovers no such dispositions manifested among the heathens concerning the miraculous. Paul’s missionary journeys focused on fertile ground with no knowledge of Christ and no concept of those who came in the power of His name. His work in Lystra is an example of how the Gentiles reacted to the miraculous.

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked.⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at

him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, “Stand up on your feet!” At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. ¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” ¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them ([Acts 14:8-13](#)).

The citizens of Lystra were not predisposed toward Paul and the miraculous. This miraculous act came as a total surprise to the Lycaonians. When one reads Luke’s account, one must ask: were the citizens of Lystra involved in gullibility to the point of deceiving themselves? Were their imaginations overheated with any kind of perception of miraculous powers belonging to Paul? No! He was dealing with individuals who had no disposition toward the miraculous. In preaching to the Gentiles, Paul was often alone, seldom more than three, as far as the written accounts reveal. If fraud were involved, Paul was in no position to solicit the magistrates, the priests, or the various sects to assist him in bringing about a fraud upon unsuspecting people. The miraculous was essential to the effectiveness of his ministry. To the Corinthians, he writes about the Spirit’s power in the ministry of the apostles, which included himself:

I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing. ¹² The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance. ¹³ How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong ([2 Corinthians 12:11-13](#))!

The power of the Spirit is seen in Paul’s ministry as one witnesses the miracle of Paul’s deliverance from a poisonous snakebite on the island of Malta. Luke records this account of Paul’s miraculous rescue with the following record:

Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.” ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. ⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many

ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed (**Acts 28:1-10**).

Again, one witnesses that these people were not gullible. They expected Paul to die. Earlier Paul had written to the Corinthians about this power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's power is always foremost in the heart and mind of Paul. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he goes right to the heart of his preaching and teaching: "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (**1 Corinthians 2:4**). Again, this message of salvation did not originate with Paul, but it came directly from Jesus. Paul lays emphasis upon the origin of his message in his Epistle to the Galatians, which message, as already stated above, was confirmed with the miraculous. In the Epistle to the Galatians, he discloses the origin of his message about salvation in and through Jesus:

¹¹I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹²I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth^a and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter^b and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. ²¹ Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they praised God because of me (**Galatians 1:11-24**).

PAUL'S SECOND VINDICATION OF HIS OWN CONVERSION

Festus and Agrippa

Paul states emphatically that this Gospel he proclaimed did not arrive to him through the apostles, but rather, it was a direct revelation from Jesus Christ Himself. Paul, years later, recounts his encounter with Jesus, an encounter that brought about a complete revolution in his thinking about God's kingdom. Prior to Paul being sent to Rome, he presented his defense, in Jerusalem, before Festus. After the exchange between Paul and Festus, Festus consulted Agrippa. The very next day, Paul gives his story of his recognition of Jesus as Lord. Fortunately, Luke gives Paul's defense for his change:

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ² "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the

accusations of the Jews,³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.⁴ “The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem.⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee.⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today.⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me.⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?⁹ “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.¹² “On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.¹³ About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic,^a ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’¹⁵ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ ” ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied.¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.’¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them¹⁸ to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’¹⁹ “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.²¹ That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.²² But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—²³ that the Christ^b would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”²⁴ At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable.²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be

a Christian?”²⁹ Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”³⁰ The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them.³¹ They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.”³² Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar” ([Acts 26:1-32](#)).

This autobiographical statement of Paul about his former rage and actions against Christians and his reason for change captures the imagination of anyone who wants the truth about Christianity. His acceptance of this new sect went against the powers that be. The contempt for Christianity by the religious leaders was universal throughout the Roman Empire. The author of this faith had been condemned as a criminal and was crucified between two thieves. This Jesus that Paul proclaimed before Agrippa and Festus was to the world “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” ([1 Corinthians 1:23](#)). Just a casual reading of his defense before Agrippa reveals that the desire of glory was not his motive. He knew that he could not expect mercy from his former associations with the religious leaders. This speech reveals that his reason for responding to the call of Jesus was not prestige, but a vision from heaven. How did the world feel about the apostles? Listen to Paul, once more, as he gives insight as to their plight: “Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world” ([4:13](#)).

Why would Paul deny worldly fame for the Christian Way? How can one account for such an about face? Did Paul, like Moses, esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the fame of his heritage? The author of Hebrews speaks of Moses’ decision to follow God in spite of the worldly fame and honor and fortune he could have had in Egypt.

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter.²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible ([Hebrews 11:24-27](#)).

Paul, too, chooses this mindset. Paul, in defense of his actions before Festus and Agrippa, explains his hatred at one time for the faith that he is now defending. Pay attention once more to Paul as he lays out his prior feelings and animosity against the Christian community with the following words:

⁹ “I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.¹¹ Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them ([Acts 26:9-11](#)).

From a worldly standpoint, Paul had nothing to gain, even as Moses. If one traces the missionary journeys of Paul, one quickly observes that he gave up prosperity, fame, and reputation, which he had acquired by his labors and studies. He gave up friends, relationships, and, perhaps, family members in order to follow the One from Nazareth. This conversion to Christ discloses that he had no desire for riches, notoriety, or control. This second discourse ([Acts 26](#)) of Paul's defense of his faith in Christ unfolds Paul's rational motive for becoming a Christian—he believed in Him. Why the change? Remember, he persecuted Christians to the day of his conversion. The only way to account for this repudiation of his earlier denials is found in his encounter with the Lord Jesus Himself. Prior to this conversion, the doctrines and interpretation of the Sacred Writings by Christians were repugnant to his sensibilities. After his conversion to the Lord Jesus, he, too, received opposition from the religious leaders. Paul was unsupported by human assistance.

Paul tells Agrippa about this event: “About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic” ([26:13-14](#)). Not only did Paul observe “a light from heaven, brighter than the sun,” but his companions also saw this light. Festus accused Paul of being “mad,” but Paul responded: “The king (Agrippa) is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner” ([26:26](#)). This event surely spread like wild fire, knowing the nature of men and women. Paul heard the voice and understood, but the others with Paul heard the voice but did not understand the words. This “light” occurred about noon. The miraculous nature of this event stunned Paul as well as those with him. If this were a fabricated story, one wonders why Paul is the only one who lost his eyesight. Why is it that only Paul understood the voice from heaven? This narrative of Paul's own account of his conversion has a ring of truth.

LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF PAUL'S CONVERSION

The first account of Paul's conversion is told by Luke. Luke recorded his version of Paul's about face from Judaism to Christ in [Acts 9](#). Luke minutes the events leading up to Paul's change from persecutor to persecuted. The actions that occurred after this face-to-face communication with Jesus altered his life forever. What happened to Paul was a total shock; he had no idea of meeting the Lord Jesus on this clandestine operation of his. In Luke's report, he says that Paul “fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him” ([9:4](#)). But then in [9:7](#), he affirms, “They heard the sound but did not see anyone.” This story, as told by Luke, too, has a ring of truth. This narrative of the heavenly vision was not a phantom, or apparition, but a real encounter with the risen Lord. Significantly, Paul was not alone but was accompanied by several others. Years later, Paul, in his defense before Agrippa develops this episode, which expansion of the events shows that he was not alone: “We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic” ([26:14](#)).

Is it possible that all of these individuals with Paul only imagined that they saw a bright light in midday? Why in midday and not at night? What about the sound? Why is it that only Paul understood the words? This apparition, or vision, did not happen at night, but in broad daylight—a time in which people are more cognizant of their senses. All of the men with him were dazed. The only way to account for this vision is that a miracle occurred. Why was Paul the only one struck blind—blind for three days? This

confrontation never left the mind of Paul. Later, in his Epistle to the Corinthians, he shared with them this most traumatic experience: “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord” (1 [Corinthians 9:1](#))? Again, Paul, in this same letter, affirms the Damascus encounter as he brings his first letter to a close: “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born” (15:7-8).

RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF PAUL’S DAY

Paul’s preaching shocked the religious opinions of his day. Paul could reason with the Jews from their own Scriptures, which they asserted contained Divine Revelation. Many Jews were converted through study of the messianic prophecies. On the other hand, the Gentiles were another matter. All of this was new to the Gentiles as a whole; they had to be taught the Old Testament as well as the New. The Gentiles expected no Christ. There is a sense in which the light of nature, even without express Revelation from God, revealed the knowledge of the One true God, even though God was not understood with the same understanding after the coming of Christ. One such example of this mindset of God’s testimony about His existence is found in [Acts 14:17](#) by Paul: “Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”

Athens

As stated earlier, Paul was no enthusiast with the negative overtones normally associated with an enthusiast. Paul’s zeal was positive—warm and eager, a zeal tempered with prudence. Paul’s external behavior reveals one who is concerned and compassionate toward all men. Paul became all things to all men in order that he might win souls to Christ (1 [Corinthians 9:2-22](#)). Paul employed various means of reaching out to the Gentiles. One such episode occurred in Athens ([Acts 17:16-34](#)). Paul knew that he was on precarious grounds in introducing Jesus and His resurrection to the Athenians. Athens had a law that made it a capital offense to introduce or teach about new gods. Josephus (AD 37-101) calls attention to this law in his writings against Apion:

(37) Of the Lacedaemonians I will say no more. But the Athenians, who considered their city open to all comers—what was their attitude in this matter? Apollonius was ignorant of this, and of the inexorable penalty which they inflicted on any who uttered a single word about the gods contrary to their laws. On what other ground was Socrates put to death? He never sought to betray his city to the enemy, he robbed no temple. No; because he used to swear strange oaths and give out (in jest, surely, as some say) that he received communications from a spirit, he was therefore condemned to die by drinking hemlock. His accuser brought a further charge against him of corrupting young men, because he stimulated them to hold the constitution and laws of their country in contempt Such was the punishment of Socrates, a citizen of Athens. Anaxagoras was a native of Clazomenae, but because he maintained that the sun, which the Athenians held to be a god, was an incandescent mass, he escaped by a few votes only from being condemned by them to death. They offered a talent for the head of Diagoras of Melos, because he was reported to have jeered at their mysteries. Protagoras, had he not promptly fled would have

been arrested and put to death, because of a statement about the gods in his writings which appeared to conflict with Athenian tenets. Can anyone wonder at their attitude towards men of such authority when they did not spare even women? They put Ninus the priestess to death, because someone accused her of initiating people into the mysteries of foreign gods; this was forbidden by their law, and the penalty decreed for any who introduced a foreign god was death. Those who had such a law evidently did not believe that the gods of other nations were gods; else they would not have denied themselves the advantage of increasing the number of their own.^[10]

As a result of his preaching, Paul was brought before Areopagus (The ordinary judges of criminal matters, and, at the same time, entrusted with care of religion) to give a defense of his actions. Luke gives some background leading up to his appearance before the Areopagus:

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babblers trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?"²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean."²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) **[Acts 17:16-21]**.

Paul did not begin his defense or arguments from the Old Testament. He began where they were in their concept of the gods in their culture. When Paul was questioned about the introduction of some strange God, Paul did not allow this dilemma to thwart his preaching Jesus as Lord and the unveiling of the One true God. Paul had a profound sense of awe and wonder about the One who created the heavens and the earth (**17:24**). Paul, through the Holy Spirit, was able to express with human words the wonder of what lies beyond this observable life—a defense that converted some of the Athenians to the Christian faith (**17:30-31**). Paul was a man of immense moral and physical courage. He knew the philosophers of Greece, not merely as textbook subjects but rather as systems of thought being taught and practiced in his day. Paul knew that one must think seriously of what one meant by the word *god*. When questioned by the authorities about his preaching and violation of the law concerning the introduction of foreign gods, he responded:

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you."²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples

built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ ²⁹ “Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man’s design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.” ³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³ At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴ A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others (17:22-34).

Paul began his message of salvation with their own inscriptions “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” One witnesses Paul’s testimony about God and the resurrection of the dead. This is a man who is not guilty of credulity or ignorant about Greek philosophy. This man seems to have been slow and hard in his acceptance of the Christian faith in Jesus. Even with all that transpired in Jerusalem before his conversion did not move him to belief. He was adamant in his opposition to members of the Way. Paul’s mind was far from being disposed to a credulous faith. Paul set out with the authority of the chief priests, but on his way to Damascus, he encountered the living Christ. This experience, and this episode alone, changed him from unbeliever to believer. He saw a vision, not a mirage. No one could have faked this kind of happening that would have changed hatred for Christ into love for Christ. It is inconceivable that the disciples of Jesus could have plotted the midday brightness, brightness brighter than the sun?

First of all, the followers of Jesus wanted to avoid this man; they knew his mission of destruction of the Christian faith. Even Ananias, a devout Jew, was reluctant to go to Paul after his arrival in Damascus. Luke records the objections of Ananias hesitation to face a man like Paul. The following is Luke’s account of his reluctance to go:

In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. ¹¹ The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.” ¹³ “Lord,” Ananias answered, “I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name” (Acts 19:10-14).

Not only did Paul experience a vision, but Ananias also experienced a vision. Both had to experience this miracle in order to bring about God's desires. Was Paul deceived by the fraud of others? No! The miracles that occurred on this day are the reasons for his change—midday light, the voice from heaven, and blindness for three days. One can only conclude that Paul's conversion cannot be attributed to negative enthusiasm, a belief resulting from credulity or ignorance.

PAUL'S FIRST VINDICATION OF HIS OWN CONVERSION

After Paul's arrival in Jerusalem and his visit to the Temple, the authorities arrested him after being seized by the crowd, a multitude that tried to kill him ([Acts 21:17-36](#)). After his arrest, Paul requested from the commander permission to speak to the crowd. He received permission and spoke to the multitude in Aramaic. This is the first full account of Paul's conversion by himself. In this account, Paul begins by giving a brief biographical sketch of his early life. This short outline reveals his rage against Christians prior to his meeting Jesus on the Damascus road. Paul Himself gives an account of his own conversion—the first record of this miraculous conversion is given by Luke in [Acts 9](#). Paul's personal story, as told by himself, is much fuller than the first testimony given by Luke. Luke reports this informative narrative of Paul's argument of his mission to preach Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles:

Then Paul said: ³ "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴ I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵ as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. ⁶ "About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷ I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' ⁸ "'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. "'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰ "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. "'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. ¹² "[A man named Ananias](#) came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴ "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name' ([22:1-16](#)).

CONCLUSION

Paul's conversion is an apologetic for the authenticity of Christianity. There is only one reason for believing Paul's conversion to be true, and that reason is: one cannot help but believe it is true. The evidence is overwhelming. If the truth of this conversion is to ring true within the heart of any individual, he or she must approach Paul's own testimony with sincerity and singleness of mind. If Paul's testimony is true, and it is true, then this claim upon Paul by Jesus makes an all-inclusive and absolute claim upon everyone who hears the message of salvation by grace through faith in this resurrected One. As a result of Paul's direct encounter with Jesus, he came to the realization that God had gone into action for the salvation of men and women in and through Jesus Christ. He came to the realization that with the advent of Jesus, God begins a new beginning—God's new beginning. Years after Paul's conversion, he expresses God's action for redemption in and through Jesus:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^a for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God ([2 Corinthians 5:17-21](#)).

Paul came to understand that in the Cross of Christ, one witnesses the public righteousness of God. This direct intervention on the part of Jesus led Paul to understand that the Cross is not just an impressive spectacle, but rather a decisive act—the moral order of God's holiness. Paul never lost sight of the fact that the Cross is the center of Christianity. When the Cross is not the heart of Christianity, then, in due time, Christianity loses its moral and public energy. One cannot read about Paul's own personal account of his conversion without a consciousness of his emphasis upon the kingdom of God. For Paul, the Cross is either the life of the new community of Christ, or it is its death. The preaching of Paul reveals that Christ did not come to earth as a grand spiritual personality, but as the Redeemer.

The three accounts of Paul's conversion, as found in the Book of Acts, reveal that there was no rational motive for Paul's transformation to the Way. All of Paul's comments in his two personal versions of his about face from Judaism to Christ imply some miraculous intervention on the part of Jesus that resulted in his role as an apostle to the Gentiles. When one reads Paul's account of his heat-of-zeal against Christians, even to the point of putting many to death, what could be his motive for such an abrupt change in this kind of behavior, unless he had had an actual meeting with the risen Jesus. Paul says that under these circumstances he became a disciple of Jesus. Only this confrontation with Jesus can account for his identification with one of the most hated of all sects by the religious leaders. Why would one embrace a faith that suffered such contempt? Why would one welcome a "faith" that had received such stinging derision, a disrespect that apparently was universal?

The very author of this faith was crucified as a criminal. He was crucified between

two thieves. He died a most ignominious death. Paul captures this shameful and terrible death with the following words: “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross (**Philippians 2:8**). Jesus had, so to speak, a ragtag army. Some of His disciples were former fishermen and unschooled (**Mark 1:16; Acts 4:13**). One of His disciples was a tax collector (**Matthew 9:9; 10:3**) and another of His disciples was a zealot (**Matthew 10:4**). Paul knew that the preaching of Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks (**1 Corinthians 1:23**). He chose people whom he knew to be looked upon by the world as the filth of the world.

What motivation would Paul have had for such identification with the hunted? There was no motivation for glory; no motivation for fame; no motivation for power; otherwise, he would have stayed with the religious leaders. Why did Paul choose a life of hardship if he had not actually experienced this meeting with the Lord Jesus? William Paley (1743-1805), in his book on *Evidences on Christianity*, had this to say about Paul’s conversion: “The consistency of St. Paul’s character throughout the whole of his history (viz. the warmth and activity of his zeal, first against, and then for Christianity) carries with it very much of the appearance of truth.”^[11]

Remember, as stated earlier, Paul graphically depicts his life of suffering after conversion to the Corinthians, a life that makes one stand in awe if the conversion did not happen the way Paul said it happened. This life of pain and anguish he chose was not a life of rags to riches, but rather a life of riches to rags. In conclusion to this study as to the authenticity of Paul’s conversion from Judaism to Christianity, one needs to read and reread the following words of Paul as he pours out his heart concerning the life he chose over again fame and honor. Pay attention to Paul as he describes and explains his life after his acceptance of Jesus:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world (**1 Corinthians 4:9-13**).

^[11] See Elgin Moyer, revised and enlarged by Earle E. Cairns, *Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 252, where it is stated:

Lyttelton, George, First Baron Lyttelton (1709-1773), English statesman and man of letters, son of Sir Thomas Lyttelton, born at Hagley, Worcestershire, England, studied at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, but took no degrees. Elected to the House of commons in 1735, where he was a member until 1756, when elevated to the House of Lords. Lord commissioner of the treasury from 1744 to 1754 and chancellor of the exchequer the next two years. When about thirty-eight, he began a serious and honest study to ascertain the truth of Christianity. The result was conviction of the truth, his conversion, and writing of *observations of the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul*.

^[2] Ibid., 429, where Moyer says,

WEST, GILBERT (1703-1756). English writer; born at Wickham, Kent, England; educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford. Served for a time in the Royal Army. Dr. Johnson included West in his *Lives of the Poets*. Noted especially for his writing *Observation on the Resurrection*, the writing of which is said to have led to his conversion; won for him a high reputation, and from Oxford the degree D.C.L. His relatives William Pitt and George Lyttelton often visited in his home; he carried on extensive correspondence with Philip Doddridge.

^[3] *Infidelity: Comprising Jenyns' Internal Evidence. Leslie's Method, Lyttelton's Conversion on Paul, Watson's Reply to Gibbon and Paine, A Notice of Hume on Miracles and an Extract From West on the Resurrection* (New York, The American Tract Society, nd), 2.

^[4] Lord Lyttelton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Paul*, third edition (London: R. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1747), 116 pages; Gilbert West, *Observations of the History and Evidence of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (London: R. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1749), 456 pages. I, Dallas Burdette, have originals of these two books in my personal library.

^[5] Frank Morrison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, 1930 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, nd).

^[6] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1943, 1952).

^[7] Ibid., 40, 41.

^[8] George Lyttelton, *Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of Paul* (London: R. Dodsley in Pall-Mall, 1742), 69.

^[9] All Scripture citations are from the *New International Version*, unless stated otherwise.

a Or *from my mother's womb*

a That is, Peter

b Or *in*; also in verse 15

a Or *hold on to*

c Some manuscripts *as I proclaimed to you God's mystery*

a Greek *unclean*

a Or *from my mother's womb*

b Greek *Cephas*

^a Or *Hebrew*

^b Or *Messiah*

^[10] Josephus, *The Life Against Apion*, 2: 37, with an English translation by H. St. J. Thackeray, Loeb Classical Library, vol., 186 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 1997), .397, 399, 401.

a Or *be a sin offering*

^[11] William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, in three parts, firth edition, Vol., 2 (London: R. Faulder, 1776; reprint, England: Gregg International Publishers, 1970), 102.